

**Sen. Susan M. Collins**

## **All Trails Celebration**

**June 25, 2011**

Thank you, Tom. Distinguished guests and friends, it is a pleasure to join you today in this great celebration. The West Saddleback Connector is a shining example of the hard work and cooperation required to realize the "All Trails" principle.

Ninety years ago, the conservationist Benton MacKaye presented our nation with a great vision. Concerned that an increasingly urban society was separating people from nature, he conceived of a chain of trails along the spine of America's eastern mountains, from Maine to Georgia, that would re-establish that vital connection.

He expressed his vision with these marvelous words: "If these people were on the skyline and kept their eyes open, they would see the things that the giant could see."

Within two years, in 1923, the first link in that chain was created in New York State. The national treasure that became known as the Appalachian Trail continued to grow. Today, Benton MacKaye's vision has been realized, from Spring Mountain, Georgia, to Mount Katahdin, Maine. The vantage point of the giant stretches for more than two thousand miles.

Millions, from throughout America and around the world, have enjoyed this treasure. For most, it is an invigorating day hike filled with inspiring views, nature, and history. A select number – now approaching 12,000 – have hiked the entire Trail.

An interesting fact about what is called the "Two Thousand Mile Club" is that close to 90 percent of these "thru-hikes" begin in Georgia and end in Maine. Experienced hikers may have some technical reason for this, but I think it's just human nature to save the best for last.

At about the same time Benton MacKaye launched his great plan, another conservationist, Aldo Leopold, made a prediction. As Americans began to have both more disposable income and leisure time, the call for public lands would also grow. As more Americans sought weekend refuge from the city, different views would emerge about recreation. And recreation, Mr. Leopold said, "is a perpetual battlefield because it is a single word denoting as many diverse things as there are diverse people."

At first, the battle was between those who listened for the quiet tread of their own footsteps and those who preferred the clatter of a horse's hooves. Then came the wheels – bicycles at first, soon joined by things motor-driven. At times, it has seemed as though this battle truly was perpetual and was being fought between an ever-increasing number of armies.

We are here today to celebrate a victory. This is not a triumph of one army over others. This is a victory for cooperation and collaboration. It is a peace that was earned through hard work and commitment, and it is one that will last.

Striking the right balance between wilderness and human activity requires, first and foremost, a willingness to appreciate other viewpoints. Only then can common ground be found. In the terminology of dedicated hikers, there is no "blue-blazing." There are no shortcuts.

From the beginning of the negotiations, I recognized that the special qualities of the Appalachian Trail and its quiet cathedrals of nature had to be preserved. At the same time, I knew that development at the Saddleback Ski Area and the growth of other forms of outdoor recreation were essential for Maine's economy and the enjoyment of those who live and visit here.

Hikers, skiers, snowmobilers, ATV riders, hunters, fishermen, and campers all want to enjoy our outdoor treasures.

By the year 2000, the only significant unprotected section along the Appalachian Trail was at Saddleback Mountain. Repeated attempts during the previous 17 years by the National Park Service and the ski resort to establish a permanent Trail corridor had not produced results.

In order to make sharing the mountain possible, I secured \$4 million for the Department of the Interior to purchase 587 acres on the southeast side of Saddleback. This legislation called upon the resort to donate 538 acres along the ridgeline, plus a scenic easement northeast of the ski slopes. The law was passed and the deeds signed in January of 2001.

The remaining issues of multiple use, trail crossings by motorized vehicles, and other issues were best resolved with the involvement of the people of Maine. So I worked to secure language in the appropriations bill calling for a portion of the land purchased with federal dollars to be conveyed to the state.

The negotiations between the National Park Service and the State of Maine to bring about this conveyance were long – nearly a decade.

But they were successful. State and federal officials deserve credit and our thanks. But this success was made possible, above all, by the diverse users who took time to see the other point of view. I especially commend the Maine Appalachian Trail Club, the Maine ATV clubs, and the Maine Appalachian Trail Land Trust, for working with each other and trusting each other.

I want to commend a former State Commissioner, former staffer, and good friend of mine, Bill Vail, for helping to bridge the differences.

Maine's heritage is to share the outdoors and to respect other users. We reject the false choice of pitting the environment against the economy because, here in Maine, the environment is the economy. They are inextricably linked.

They will remain so as long as government, recreational groups, businesses and private landowners work together, talk together, and solve problems together. The West Saddleback Connector is proof that the "All Trails" approach leads in the right direction. Standing here today on Benton MacKaye's skyline, you don't have to be a giant to see that there is plenty of room for all of us, as long as all of us are willing to make room. Congratulations to all who made this day possible.